

cyrenians
SCCR

Scottish Centre for
Conflict Resolution

EMOTIONS AND THE BRAIN

**INFORMATION AND ACTIVITY
WORKBOOK**

1. My Brain
2. My Emotions
3. My Wellbeing
4. Our Relationships

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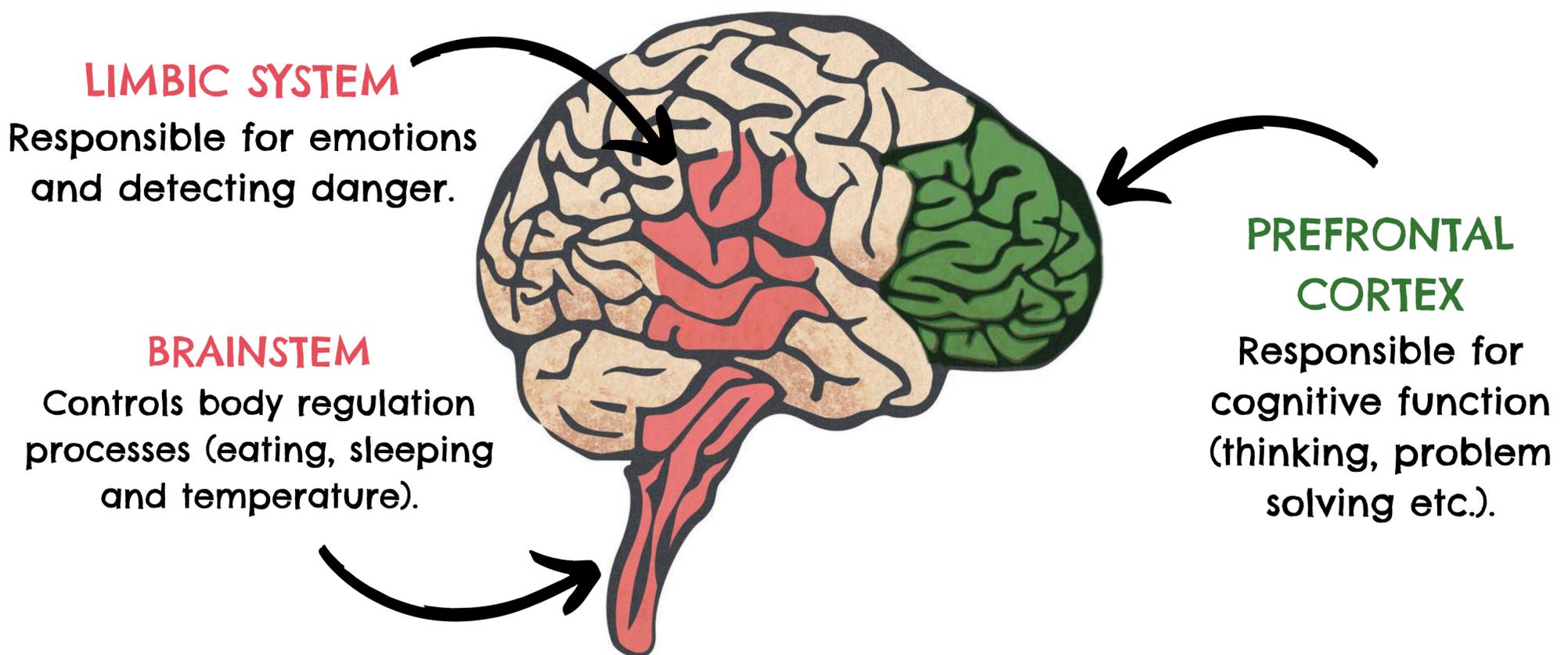
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1. My Brain

Learning Objectives:

1. Name the parts of the brain and describe their roles.
2. Explain how and why they respond to conflict differently.
3. Name the 5 Emotional States.
4. Explain the importance of chemicals in the brain.

Parts of the Brain



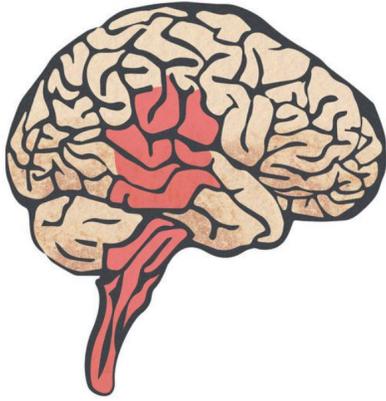
The brain is the most complex organ in the body and controls our thoughts, memory, emotion, behaviours and all the processes that regulate our body. The **oldest part**, our **Lizard Brain**, is made up of the **brainstem** (or reptilian brain) and the **limbic system** (or old mammalian brain). The **newest part** of the brain, our **Monkey Brain**, is the **prefrontal cortex** (or new mammalian brain).



Watch a video on parts of the brain

Evolution of the Brain

The Lizard Brain was developed first to **protect** us from predators and other threats. It is essential for survival. The Monkey Brain was developed later in our ancestors to help us **work as a group** and advance as a species.



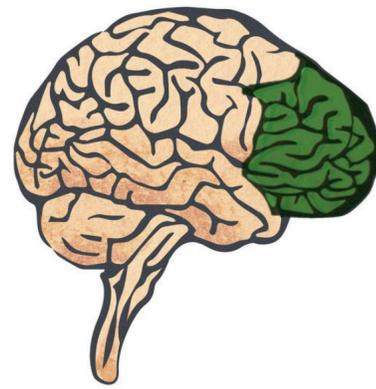
Lizard Brain

How did we use it then?

Run away from a lion.

How do we use it now?

Jump out of the way of a moving car.



Monkey Brain

How did we use it then?

Gathering and sharing food.

How do we use it now?

Working together to solve a puzzle.

The Brain in Conflict

Most of the time our Monkey and Lizard Brains **work together**. Our Lizard Brain detects emotions and possible danger, and the Monkey Brain evaluates and reflects on the information, considers different viewpoints and uses problem solving to resolve the conflict. Sometimes when we are overwhelmed with emotion, our Lizard and Monkey Brains lose connection and the Lizard Brain takes over. We can go into a **FIGHT, FLIGHT** or **FREEZE** state - our survival mode!

I feel angry!

Stay calm! Why is that and how can we solve the problem?





Check out our
Monkey Vs Lizard Quiz!

Exercise 1.1

Instructions: Read the scenarios and draw a line to sort the responses into Monkey or Lizard response.

Sammy has fallen out with their friend over something that was said in a group chat. Sammy is feeling angry so Sammy...

Avoids them in school.

Talks to them about how they are feeling.

Considers their friend's side of the story.

Shouts at them.

Gets into a physical fight.

Comes up with a cunning plan to get them back.

Sammy is having an argument with their parent /carer about school work so Sammy...

Goes to their room and slams the door.

Pretends that they can't hear what their parent/carers is saying.

Takes some time to think about why they feel angry.

Gets upset and starts to cry.

Tries to make their parent/carers feel guilty.

Explains that they are going for a walk to clear thier head and can talk later.

LIZARD

MONKEY

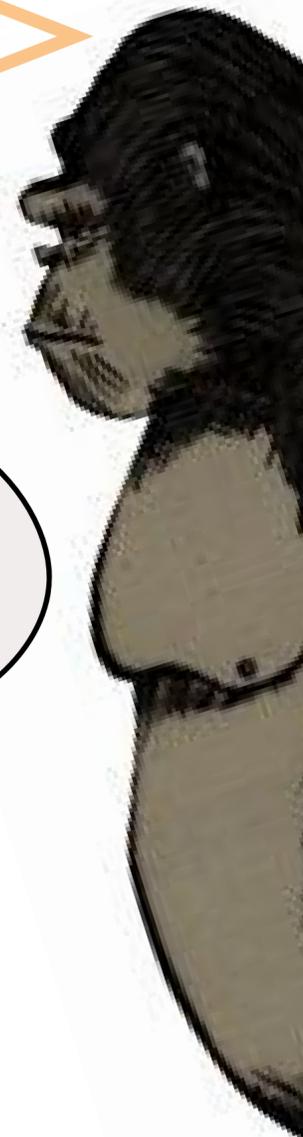
Activity 1a

Instructions: In the table, write down some of the pros and cons for the monkey and lizard responses to conflict. Think about times when the different parts of the brain might be useful.



I respond to conflict automatically and instinctively. I'm driven by emotion.

I use empathy, planning, evaluation and reflection to respond to conflict. I'm driven by thinking.



LIZARD		MONKEY	
Pro	Con	Pro	Con

What Affects Conflict Responses?

There are lots of things that affect our response to conflict such as who we are in conflict with, where and when the conflict takes place, and how we are feeling at the time. But our brain development can also affect the Monkey/Lizard brain connection which determines how we respond to conflict. Here are a few things that affect our brain development:

1. AGE



Watch a video on the teenage brain!



When we are teenagers our brain goes through a process of "remodelling". This process starts with the oldest part of the brain and our monkey brain (prefrontal cortex) is the last part to be remodelled. This means we tend to rely on our Lizard responses more as a teenager.

2. Life Experience

If we have had a particularly stressful experience, the danger detector in the Lizard Brain becomes overactive and we might enter a fight/flight/freeze state more quickly. This is particularly true if we experienced this stress as a baby/child as we learn that the world is a dangerous place and therefore our brain detects threats that may not actually be there.



Emotional States



Watch a video on emotional states!

Emotional states drive how we act and react. They are affected by the chemicals in our brain and our past experiences. We move through different emotional states throughout the day depending on the different chemicals in our brain. Emotional states are different to individual emotions. (e.g. we can be in a Fight or Flight state, but could be feeling fear, anger, or rejection emotions).

	<h3>REST AND DIGEST</h3> <p>"I'm chilled out & happy"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relaxed muscles • Slow heart rate and breathing • Brain and body recharging 	
	<h3>ALERT AND ENGAGED</h3> <p>"I'm optimistic, focused, energised"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscles relaxed but ready for action • Even breathing and heart rate 	
	<h3>ANXIOUS AND AFRAID</h3> <p>"Something bad is going to happen"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased heart rate • Heightened senses • Preparing for danger 	
	<h3>FIGHT OR FLIGHT</h3> <p>"I feel afraid but I look angry"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart pumping, breathing fast • Muscles tense • Looking for danger 	
	<h3>FREEZE OR SHUTDOWN</h3> <p>"I want to be invisible"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heart rate, breathing and digestion slows • No moving, stay small 	

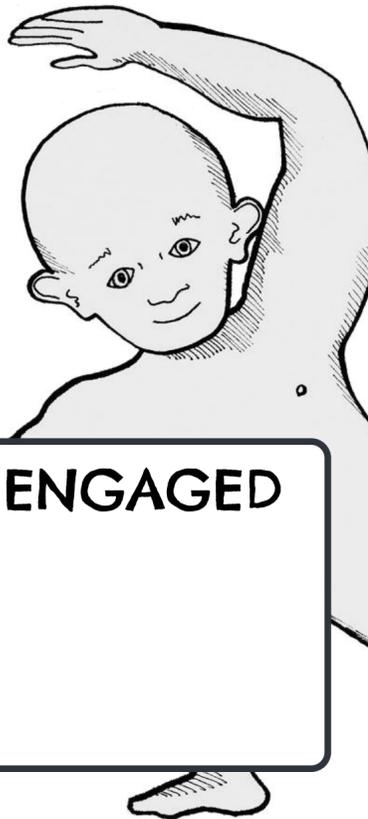
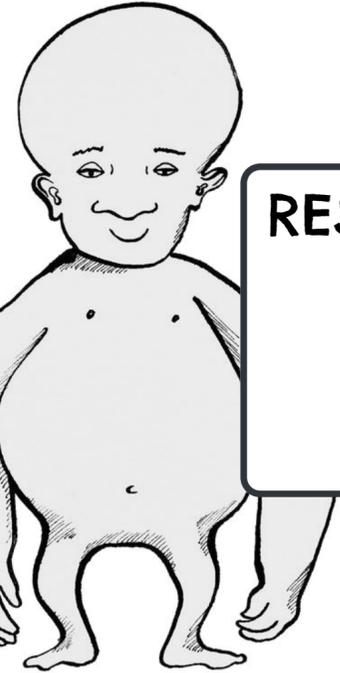


Learn more about Emotional States here!

Activity 1b

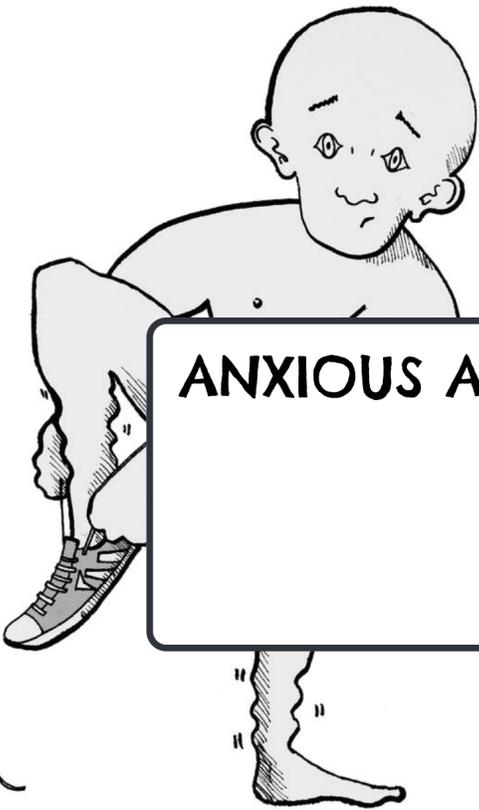
Instructions: Can you think of an example of when you have been in each of the emotional states?

REST AND DIGEST



ALERT AND ENGAGED

ANXIOUS AND AFRAID



FIGHT OR FLIGHT



FREEZE AND SHUTDOWN



Brain Chemicals

Watch a video on
brain chemicals!



We have an amazing drugs cabinet in our brain. These chemicals are called neurochemicals and they all play an important role in keeping us mentally, physically and emotionally healthy. The trick is to get the right balance of chemicals!

ACTION DRUG

Heightens senses and awareness, increases energy and improves body performance and stamina.

PROTECTOR DRUG

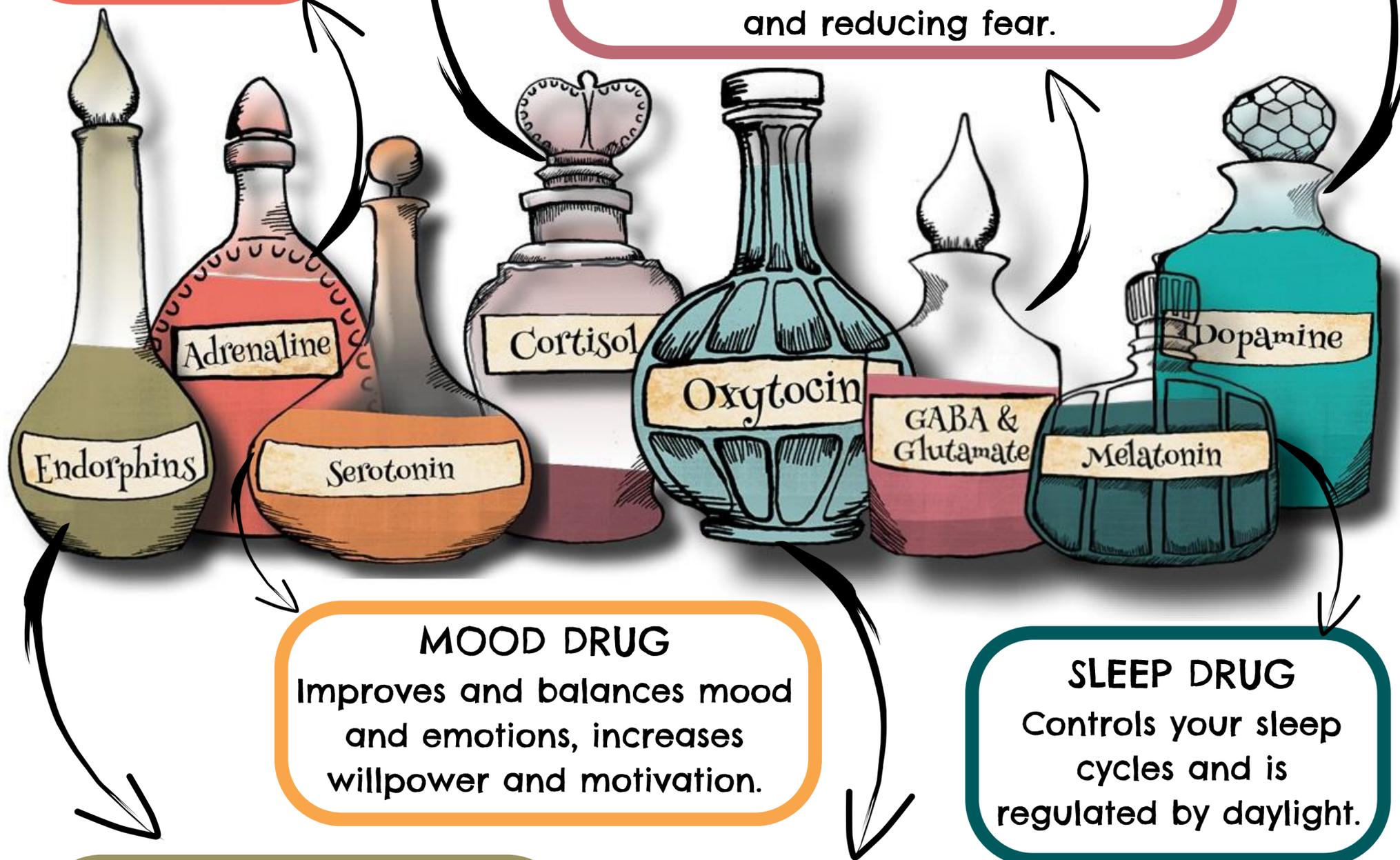
Controls energy use, focuses memory and concentration, heightens senses, and increases endurance.

JOY DRUG

Heightens experiences and increases excitement, anticipation, creativity and problem-solving.

BALANCING DRUG

Has an energising and excitatory effect while also soothing, calming and reducing fear.



MOOD DRUG

Improves and balances mood and emotions, increases willpower and motivation.

SLEEP DRUG

Controls your sleep cycles and is regulated by daylight.

PAIN RELIEF DRUG

Sense of elation, excitement, pleasure, desire and satisfaction, increases social confidence and reduces pain.

LOVE DRUG

Feelings of love, trust and positivity, improves connection, communication and self-confidence, reduces anxiety.

Exercise 1.2

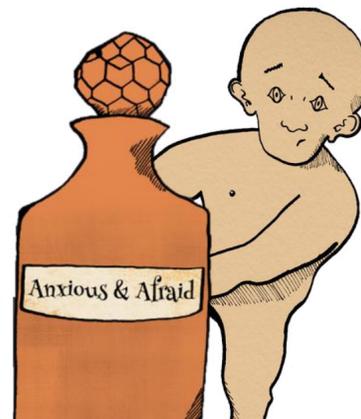
Instructions: Draw a line to match each scenario to an emotional state. Then guess what chemicals make up that state. Some chemicals are in more than one state.



1.
2.
3.

You're about to go for a run or walk in your favourite place, the sun is shining and you feel energised but relaxed.

You have just opened your exam paper and your mind goes blank. You can't think. You can't even pick up your pen to start.



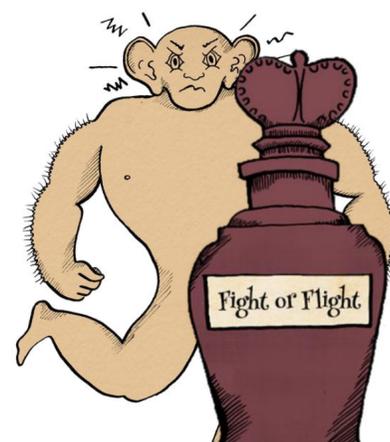
1.
2.
3.



1. Dopamine
2.
3.

You're about to start a rugby match. Last time you played you got injured and the other team look really big. This could go badly.

You're chilling watching your favourite movie with your best friend. You feel comfortable around them and can trust them with anything.



1.
2.

Someone says something offensive about someone in your family. You begin to feel really angry, like you're ready to punch them.



1.

CHOOSE FROM:
Adrenaline, Cortisol,
Dopamine,
Endorphins, GABA
Glutamate, Oxytocin,
Serotonin

Hint: Melatonin isn't included as it links to daylight rather than emotional state

Summary:

1. We have a Lizard Brain (Limbic system + brainstem) and a Monkey Brain (Prefrontal Cortex).
2. Lizard Brain is responsible for automatic, emotion driven responses, good in dangerous situations. Monkey Brain is responsible for evaluating, reflecting, problem solving and empathising, which can help resolve conflict.
3. Most of the time the Monkey Brain is in control of the Lizard Brain. In a conflict situation, the Monkey Brain can help us see the other person's point of view and solve the problem. However, if the Monkey and Lizard brain lose connection and the Lizard Brain takes over, we are overwhelmed with emotion and can go into Fight or Flight or Freeze and Shutdown states leading to more impulsive actions.
4. The Emotional States are: Rest and Digest, Alert and Engaged, Anxious and Afraid, Fight or Flight, and Freeze and Shutdown.
5. We have lots of different brain chemicals that drive our emotional states and guide our behaviour.

Extra Notes:



Visit the My Brain
page here!



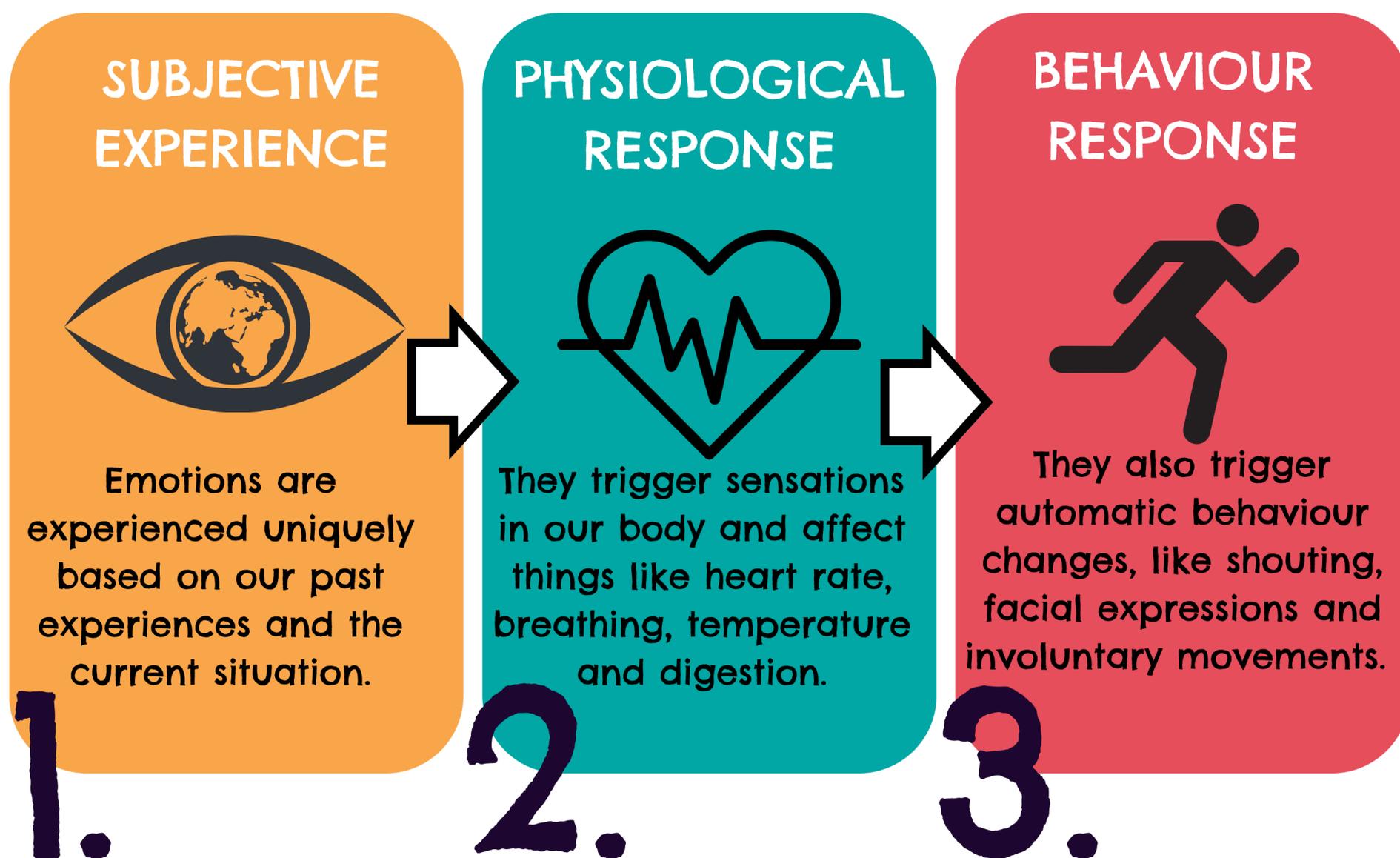
2. My EMOTIONS

Learning Objectives:

1. Name the 3 elements that make up an emotion.
2. Describe how you recognise emotions in yourself and others.
3. Explain why emotions are important.
4. Describe the window of tolerance.
5. Name the 5 stages of the emotional arousal cycle.
6. State the difference between primary and secondary emotions.

What Are Emotions?

Emotions are things that we experience in response to the world around us. They are a process that happens in **three parts**.



Recognising Your Emotions

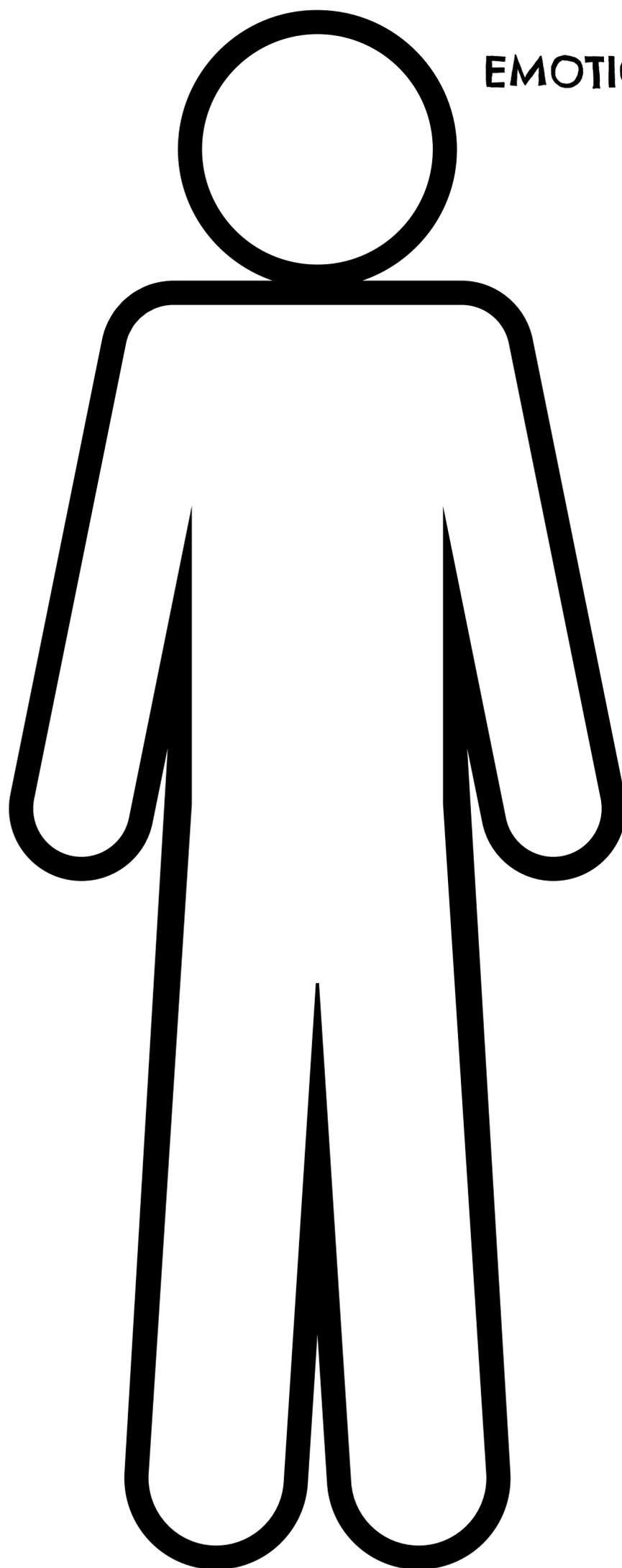
We can learn how to **identify and name the emotions** we are feeling by recognising how they feel in our bodies and the behavioural responses they trigger.

Once we are able to identify and name the emotions we are feeling, we can start to think about what causes us to feel that way, so that we can respond to them in a healthy way.

	THINGS WE FEEL	THINGS WE NOTICE
HAPPINESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling of lightness • Warmth in chest • Butterflies in stomach • Changes in breathing • Increased heart rate • Relaxed body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happy tears • Jumping or being energetic • Lifted posture • Smiling • Laughing • Upbeat tone of voice • Pupils dilated
SADNESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heaviness • Tight chest/sense of "heartache" • Sinking feeling • Tiredness/sickness • Lump in the throat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Furrowed brows • Slumped posture • Low voice • Comfort habits • Withdrawal • Crying
WORRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased heart rate • Dizziness • Increased sweating • Churning stomach • Shallow rapid breathing • Goosebumps/chills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trembling • Wide eyes • Open mouth • Weakness in the legs • Shrinking posture • Comfort habits
ANGER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racing heart • Tense muscles • Hotness • Sweating • Churning stomach • Tight chest • Fast breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red face • Clenched jaw or fist • Fidgeting or shaking • Raised voice • Lowered eyebrows • Puffed out chest • Pursed lips • Nostrils flared

Activity 2a

Instructions: Choose an emotion and draw/label how it feels in your body. HINT: Think about your heart rate, temperature, breathing and facial expression.



EMOTION: _____

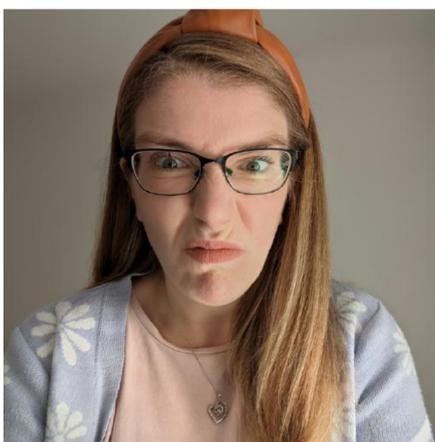
Recognising Other People's Emotions

As well as recognising our own emotions, it's also important to be able to recognise other people's emotions. We can look out for some of the **physiological** and **behavioural** responses that we experience too. Things like **body language**, facial **expressions** and **tone of voice** are good indicators of emotion.

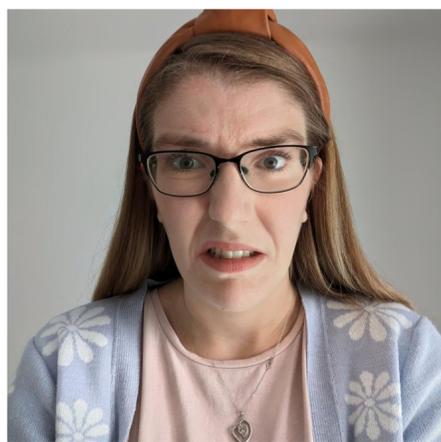
While emotions are experienced uniquely, research has shown that the facial expressions for **joy**, **surprise**, **contempt**, **sadness**, **anger**, **disgust**, and **fear** are universal regardless of race, culture, nationality, gender, religion, or any other variable. Facial expressions can happen very quickly making them hard to spot.

Exercise 2.1

Instructions: Match one of emotion words in the box to each facial expression picture.



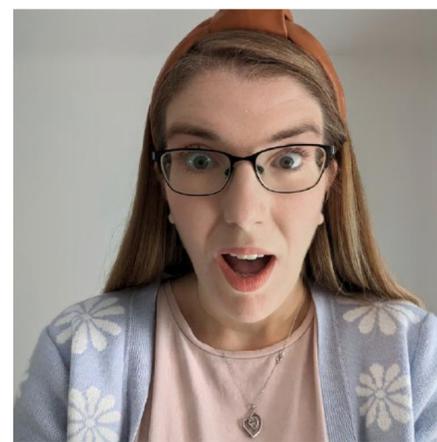
1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



7.

Happiness Anger Fear Sadness
Contempt Surprise Disgust

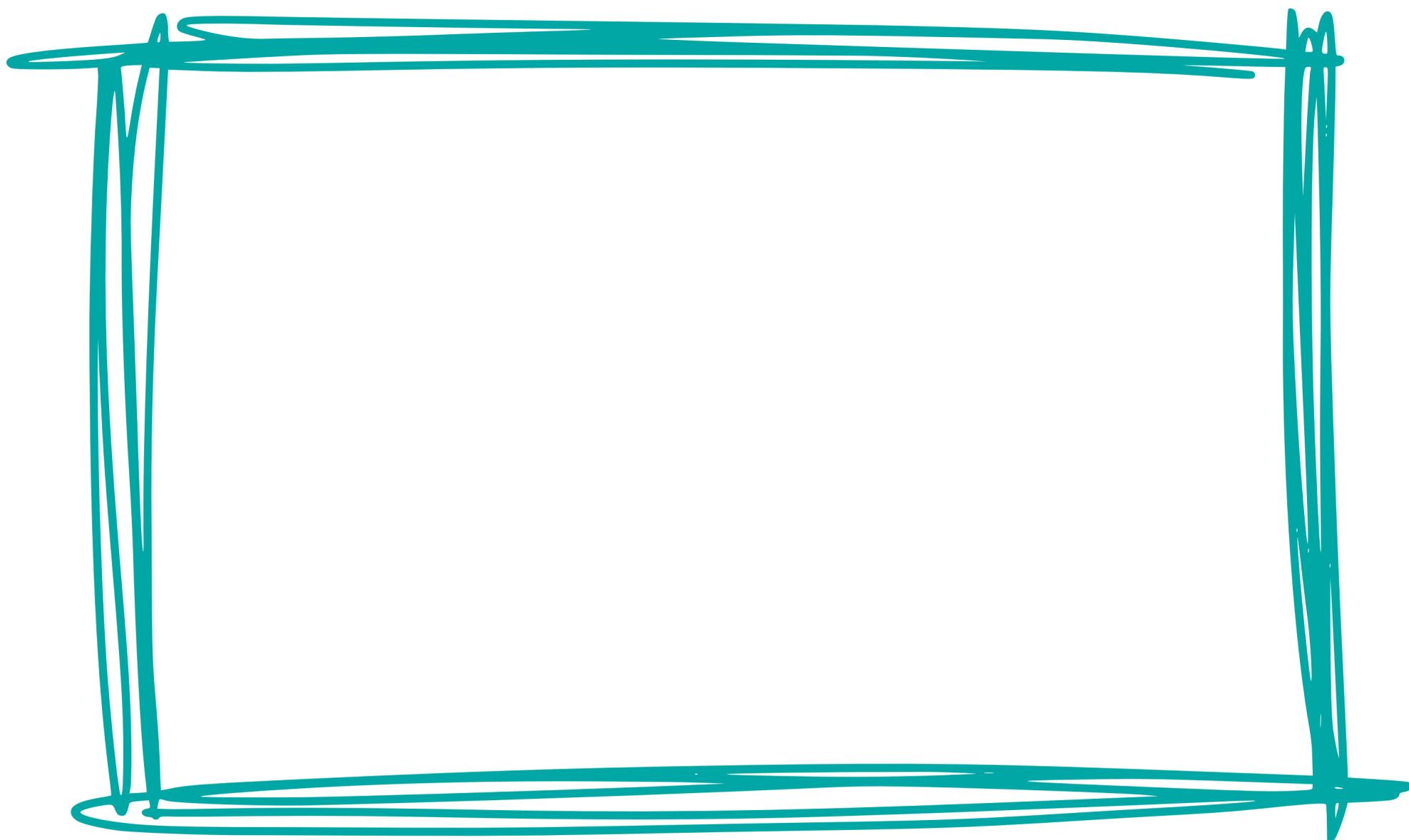
Types of Emotion

We often associate different emotions with being either good or bad. But this is not true. **All emotions are important** and they are neither positive nor negative. Sometimes emotions can feel **comfortable or uncomfortable** and the sensations they cause in our body can be **pleasant or unpleasant**. This is completely **normal**.

There are many **different types** of emotions. The more accurate we can be in identifying our emotions, the more able we are to **understand our needs**. It can be helpful to express to ourselves or others how we are feeling in words or pictures.

Activity 2b

Instructions: in the box below, write down as many different emotion words as you can in 1 minute.



Now compare your answers to The Feelings Wheel on the next page. Are there any words you don't recognise?

Activity 2c

Instructions: Fill in the box to complete the emotion, message or action.

EMOTION

Happiness

Worry

Shame

Anger

Sadness

MESSAGE

I need to enjoy this moment.

I need to feel better about myself.

I need to explore and learn.

I need comfort.

I need safety.

ACTION

Show gratitude.

Talk to a friend.

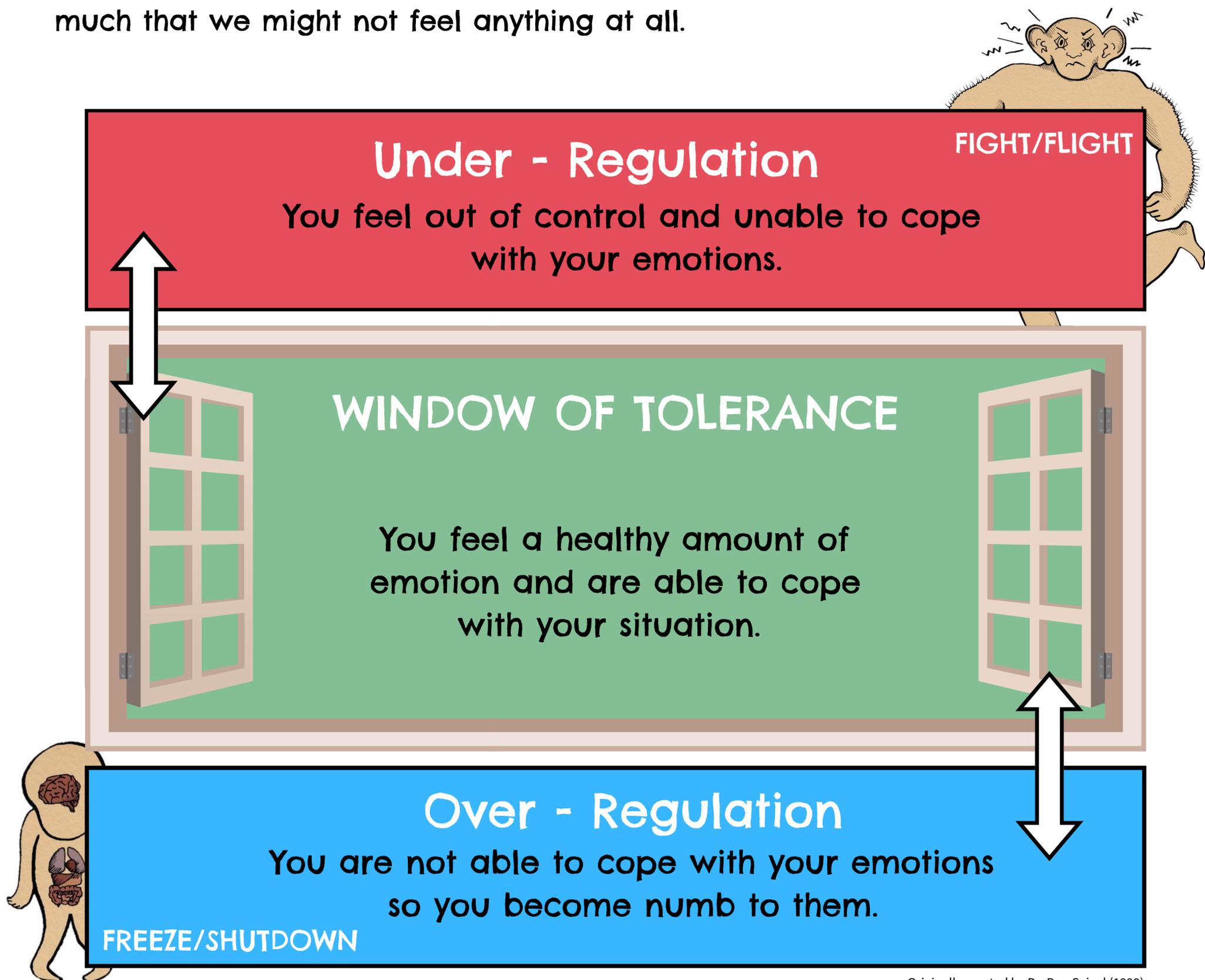
Ask a question.

I will resolve the problem.

Remove myself from the situation.

Emotional Regulation

While there is no such thing as a bad emotion, emotions can become unhelpful if they are **over-regulated** or **under-regulated**. When we are able to cope with our emotions in a healthy way, we call this our **"window of tolerance"** or the **"green zone"**. If our emotions become too much and we are no longer able to cope we move into our **"red zone"** where our emotions are under-regulated. If our emotions are not active enough, we might move into our **"blue zone"**, where our emotions are over-regulated. This means they are regulated so much that we might not feel anything at all.



Originally created by Dr. Dan Siegel (1999)

Our window of tolerance can **grow and shrink** depending on who we are with, what's going on in our life, our past experiences, and how much sleep we've had. On a good day, if someone shouts at us we might feel able to cope with it easily. On a bad day, our window of tolerance is small, and we might move into our red zone instead. There are lots of things we can do to help regulate our emotions, which we will look at in Lesson 3.

Emotions Vs Behaviour

So we know that emotions come with automatic behavioural responses, but they also give us behaviour **URGES**. These are **behaviours that we can control**. For example, when we are angry we might get the urge to hit something, and when we are feeling love we might get the urge to hug someone. But we can **choose** whether or not to act on these urges.

Anger is often misunderstood and seen as a negative emotion. But anger is something **we all experience naturally**. In fact, anger is an important emotion when it comes to recognising or standing up to wrongdoing. Sometimes anger is confused with behaviours such as aggression.

ANGER

A healthy emotion that we can learn to release and express in positive ways.

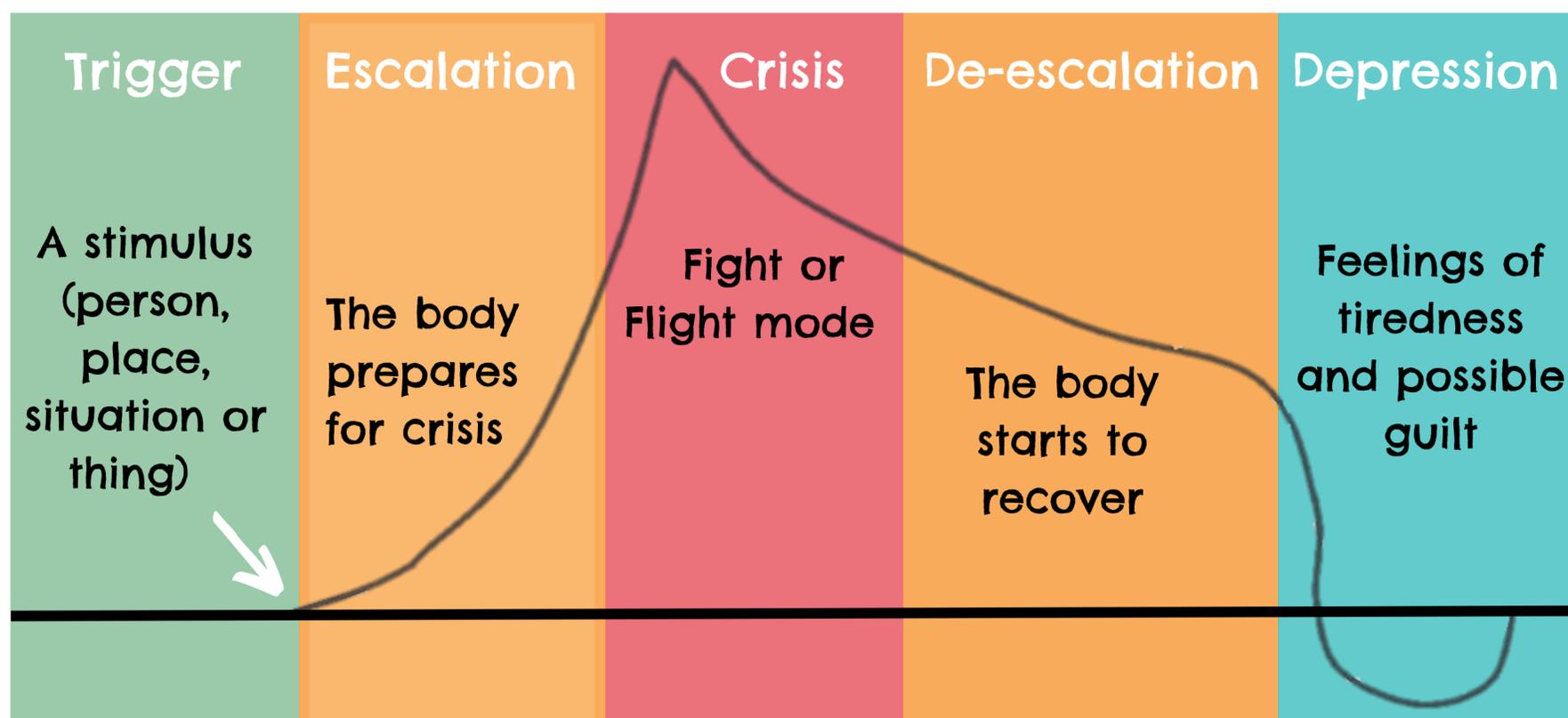
VS

AGGRESSION

An unhelpful behaviour that can come from anger, often involving force or violence.

Emotional Arousal Cycle

The **Emotional Arousal Cycle** shows a pattern that often happens when we become overwhelmed by our emotions. In the **Crisis Phase** we struggle to control our behavioural urges. It is helpful to think about what our **triggers** are and how we can recognise our **Escalation Phase** to stop ourselves reaching the crisis point.



Activity 2d

Instructions: Write down some of your triggers in the green box. Then for each stage, write down how you feel (emotions and body sensations) and some behaviours you might show.

MY TRIGGERS:

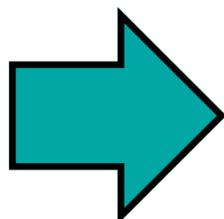
	ESCALATION	CRISIS	DE-ESCALATION	DEPRESSION
Feelings				
Behaviours				

Primary and Secondary Emotions

There are two types of emotions, **primary** and **secondary**. They are produced slightly differently. So far we have been talking about primary emotions.

PRIMARY EMOTIONS

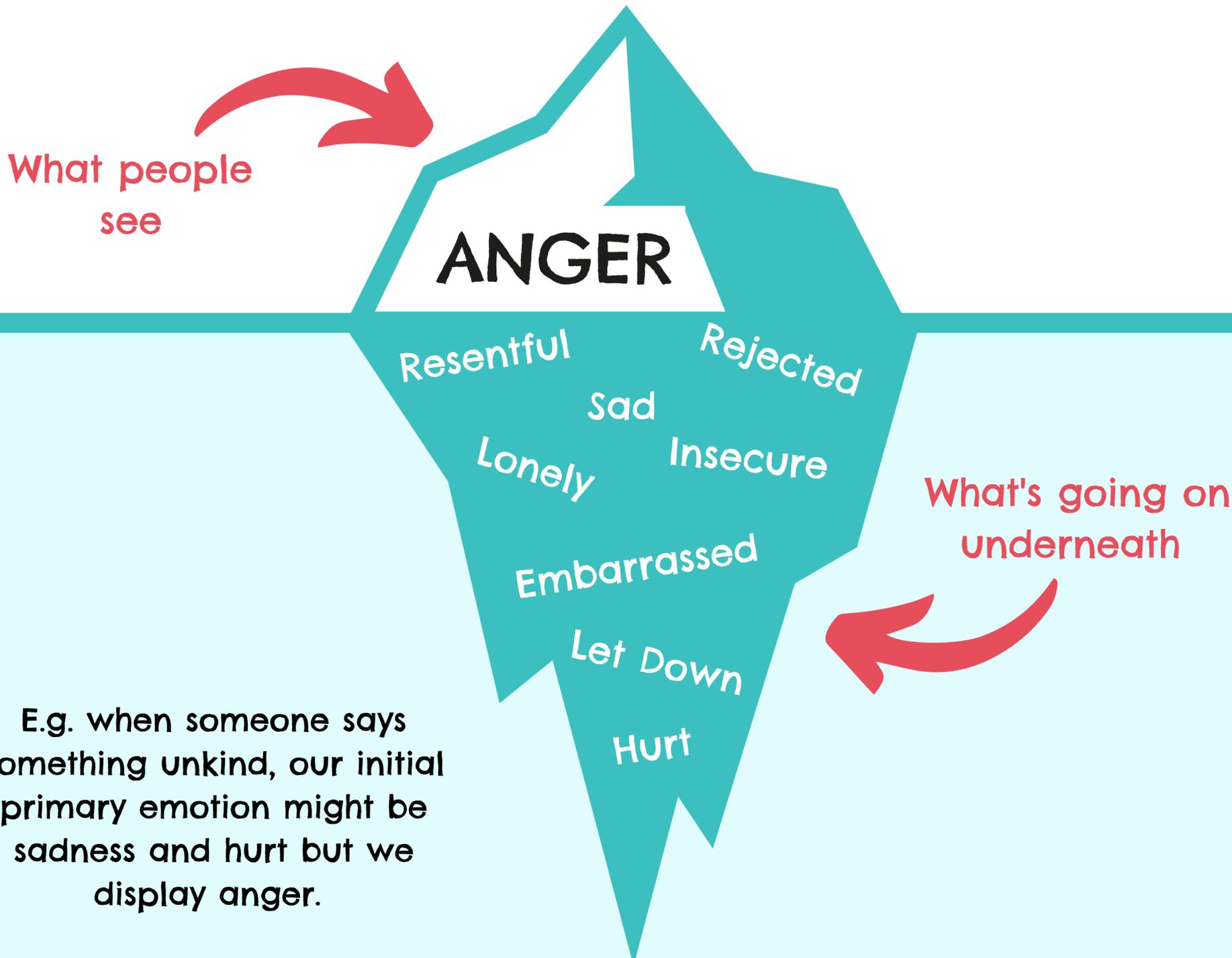
- The first emotion we feel when something happens.
- Raw, instinctive emotion.
- Usually accompanied with a sensation in the body and behaviour response.



SECONDARY EMOTIONS

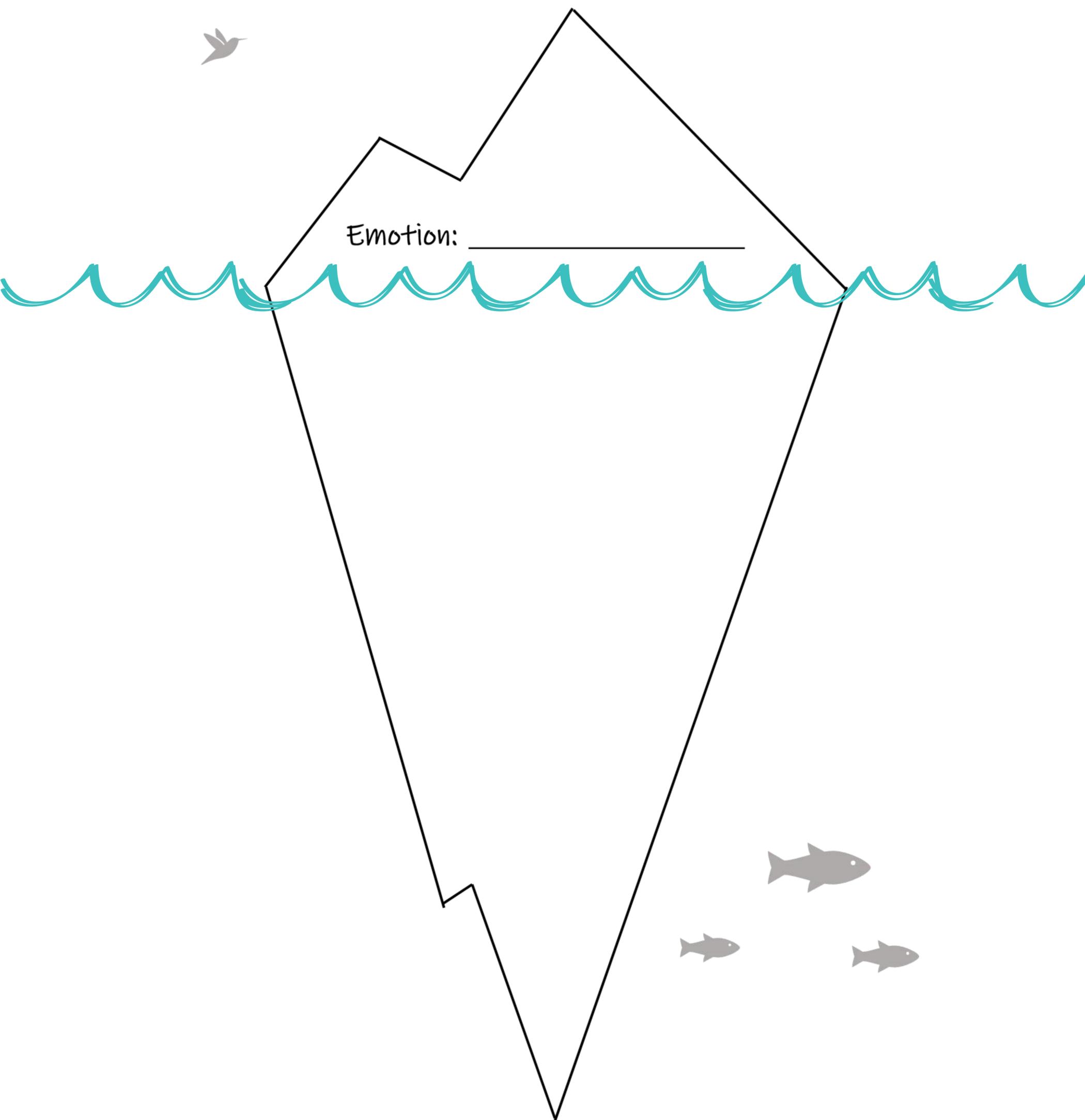
- Felt after, in response to the primary emotion.
- Usually learnt or experienced out of habit.
- Can mask the primary emotion.

Sometimes we only see the **secondary emotion** and we have to go back and figure out what our **primary emotions** were to understand how we are feeling. Like an **iceberg**, we can only see what's on the **surface** but there is much more going on **underneath**.



Activity 2e

Instructions: Choose a secondary emotion and write it in the tip of the iceberg. This is the emotion that others might see. Now think about everything that is going on underneath and write down all the primary emotions under the surface



Summary:

1. Emotions are made up of: the subjective experience, the physiological response, and the behavioural response.
2. Sensations in the body like breathing, heart rate, sweating, temperature and muscle tension can help us recognise our emotions. Behavioural responses like facial expressions, body language and movements can help us recognise other people's emotions.
3. Emotions are like messages to the brain carrying important information about what we need. They help guide our actions.
4. When we are in our window of tolerance we are able to cope with our emotions. Emotions can be unhelpful if we move into our red zone (under-regulation) or blue zone (over-regulation).
5. In the Emotional Arousal Cycle we go through five stages: Trigger, Escalation, Crisis, De-escalation, Depression.
6. Primary emotions are the raw emotions. They can lead to secondary emotions which are often learnt emotions. Secondary emotions can mask primary emotions.

Extra Notes



Visit the My Emotions
page here!

3. My Wellbeing

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe what coping skills are.
2. Know the difference between emotion, thought and problem focused approaches.
3. List some things you can try to help soothe your emotions and boost your mood.
4. Explain why it might be important to “sit with” an emotion.
5. Describe what is meant by unhelpful thinking and intrusive thoughts.

What Are Coping Skills?

Coping skills are things that we do to help **deal with stress** or other difficult situations. We might use them to come to terms with loss or change, or to **get out of our heads** when things feel **overwhelming**. There are lots of different types of coping skills and it's important you find the ones that work for you. Some coping skills are more helpful than others, so it is important to consider their short-term and long-term effects. Like everything, these skills can **take practice** and they don't always work straight away. Practicing healthy coping skills helps us to build **resilience** and take control of our own **wellbeing**.

Choosing a Coping Skill

When we find ourselves in a difficult situation we can take a **problem-focused** approach, **emotion-focused** approach or a **thought-focused** approach. With a problem-focused approach we aim to tackle the problem itself, whereas an emotion-focused approach helps us deal with the the feelings that the problem is causing. Sometimes we do a bit of both. For example, if you are someone who gets anxious in exams, you might make a timetable for revision (problem-focused) while also practicing some breathing exercises to relax before the exam (emotion-focused). A thought-focused approach helps us change the way we think about the problem, so we might think about the exam as a chance to show our learning rather than as a test.



 Watch a video on coping skills!





Coping Skills Map

Try following this map to explore different coping skills:

Try some breathing and grounding exercises!

Do you need to respond to the emotion, the thought or the problem?

EMOTION

THOUGHT

PROBLEM

Do you need to respond, process/accept, or express your emotion?

RESPOND

EXPRESS

PROCESS & ACCEPT

Do you need to soothe your emotion or boost your mood?

SOOTHE

BOOST

TIPS

- Breathing exercises
- Muscle relaxation
- Talk to someone
- Exercise
- Grounding exercise
- Soothing sound, smell, view etc.

TIPS

- Time with loved ones
- Positive self talk
- Exercise
- Favourite hobbies
- Cold shower
- Time in nature
- Smile, laugh

TIPS

- Journaling
- Set worry time
- Notice how you feel
- Name, accept and explore the emotion
- Self-compassion

TIPS

- Tell someone
- Write it down
- Draw it
- Move your body
- Cry
- Make noise
- Do something creative

TIPS

- Recognise unhelpful thinking (negative, intrusive, extreme, & catastrophic thoughts)
- Separate thoughts & facts (see page 29)

TIPS

- Remove yourself from situation
- To-do list
- Timetable
- Set boundaries
- Set priorities
- Problem solve
- Ask for support

Responding to Emotions

Try this
breathing video!



If we think back to the **window of tolerance**, sometimes we might use coping strategies to get back into our **green zone**. We can use coping strategies to **soothe feelings** of anxiety, stress or anger when we are feeling overwhelmed or to **boost our mood** when we are feeling low.

BREATHING

Increases oxygen levels and reduces blood pressure. This helps us relax and stops us going into our fight/flight mode.

GROUNDING

Things that help us focus on the present moment. Techniques might include body awareness, mental exercises, or mindfulness practice.

DISTRACTION

Doing things you enjoy or spending times with friends can boost your oxytocin, dopamine and serotonin levels to improve your mood.

EXERCISE

Serotonin, dopamine and endorphins are released during exercise. They boost mood, improve concentration and sleep, and release stress/anger.

Activity 3a

Instructions: Complete the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding exercise below, focusing on your senses. This helps us feel calm and present in the moment.

5	Things you can see:	
4	Things you can touch:	
3	Things you can hear:	
2	Things you can smell:	
1	Thing you can taste:	



Try this grounding
video!

Activity 3b

Try this walking
video!



Instructions: Make a list, or draw all the things you can think of that boost your mood and help calm you down. Try coming up with a playlist to boost your mood or a quick exercise routine to release stress.

THINGS THAT MAKE ME HAPPY

THINGS THAT CALM ME DOWN

MY PLAYLIST

MY WORKOUT

Expressing Emotions

Part of responding to our emotions might be to express them. **Releasing** your emotions in a healthy way can **reduce feelings of stress** as well as **physical tension** in your body. Being able to express our emotions also allows us to ask for the right help and support. Here are some ways we can express emotion:

PHYSICAL RELEASE

- Screaming
- Crying
- Exercise
- Deep breathing
- Hitting a pillow

USING WORDS

- Talking about it
- Journalling
- Using the Feelings Wheel

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

- Draw/paint
- Write a song/poem
- Dance
- Play music
- Sing

Sitting with Emotions

Sometimes it is not possible for us to change the way we are feeling and it can be unhelpful to ignore or dismiss our emotions. Instead, we might need time to process how and why we are feeling a certain way and **accept our emotions**. We might need to **“sit with”** our emotions before we are able to express them to others. If we dismiss our emotions, they might come out in less healthy ways. Try these steps to **process and accept** your emotions:

1 NOTICE

Think about how you are feeling in your body.

2 NAME

What emotion are you feeling? Name it.

3 ACCEPT

Acknowledge how you are feeling without judgement and be kind to yourself.

4 EXPLORE

Why are you feeling like this? Be curious about why and how you feel emotions.

5 ALLOW

Let yourself feel the emotion fully, recognising that emotions are temporary and may come and go in waves.

Challenging Unhelpful Thoughts

Watch a video on
unhelpful thinking
styles!



Sometimes it is the way that we are **thinking** about the situation that is causing the problem and resulting in uncomfortable emotions. Some **patterns of thinking** can be **unhelpful**. If we are able to **recognise unhelpful thinking styles** we can **challenge and reframe** these thoughts.

Activity 3c

Instructions: Read through the unhelpful thinking styles below and tick the ones that might apply to you. Then check out the QR codes!

Unhelpful Thinking Style	Description	Solution	✓
All or Nothing	"It's either perfect or I've failed" Extreme thinking can cause us to be overcritical or give up easily.	List alternatives that fall between the extremes.	
Mental Filter 	"Everything is terrible" Focusing on the negatives and discounting the positives.	Gratitude and affirmation journal, challenge negative thoughts.	
Catastrophising 	"This is the worst thing ever" Imagining and worrying about the worst possible outcome.	Decatastrophising thought challenge, set worry time.	
Jumping to Conclusions 	"I know what's happened" Making assumptions (often negative) without evidence.	Write down all the evidence or do a fact vs opinion check (p31).	
Should/Must 	"I must do this" Setting unrealistic expectations of yourself which may decrease self-esteem.	Set realistic expectations and avoid overcriticising.	
Personalisation 	"It's all my fault" Over personalising situations or assuming responsibility or involvement without reason.	Challenge negative thoughts about yourself, write down alternatives.	

Negative Thought Challenge 

Setting Worry Time 

Decatastrophising Thought Challenge 

The most important thing is to practice recognising when we have these thoughts and **acknowledge them as unhelpful**. It is important to show **self compassion** and speak to yourself the way you would speak to a friend.

Fact vs Opinion

Knowing the difference between a **fact** and **opinion** can help challenge unhelpful thinking styles. Sometimes when we are under a lot of stress, we can be driven more by our **emotions and opinions**. Our emotions strengthen our opinions which leads to even bigger emotions! If we can recognise that many of our thoughts are opinions rather than facts, we can respond more **calmly** and **rationally** (practice this in Activity 3d).

FACT



- Undeniable
- Backed up by evidence
- Driven by rational thinking

OPINION



- Arguable
- Driven by emotion
- Based on belief or personal view

Intrusive Thoughts

Just as we can't always respond and change the emotions we are feeling, we can't always change our thoughts. Sometimes they just pop into our head without warning. An **intrusive thought** is a thought that we can't control. These thoughts might be **distressing or annoying** but they are **just thoughts**, we don't need to act on them. Just like **Fact vs Opinion** we can ask ourselves 2 questions:

1. Is this a thought or is it a fact?

2. Is this thought or fact helpful for me?

It can be helpful to think of your mind as a taxi. You are the driver and your thoughts are passengers. You are in **control**. If we have thoughts that are **unhelpful**, we might not be able to get rid of them, but we can pay them less attention and ask them to "**sit in the backseat**". If we have thoughts that are helpful to us, we can invite them to "**sit in the front seat**". We can focus on helpful thoughts and facts to guide our actions. Think of these thoughts as **passengers giving directions**, you pay them more attention, but you are still the driver.

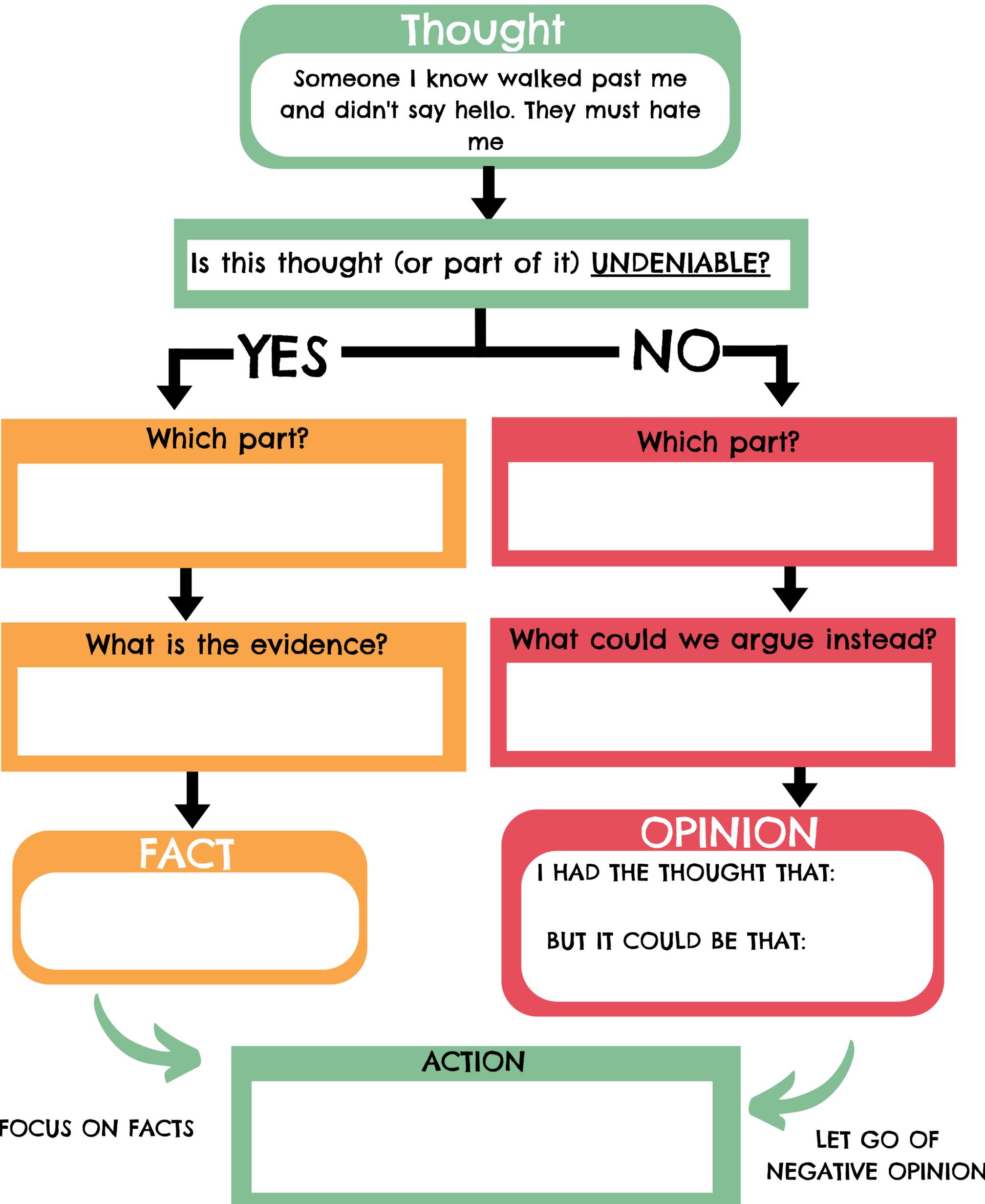


Watch a video on intrusive thoughts!



Activity 3d

Instructions: Follow the chart below to see how we can separate facts and opinions when we have negative thoughts.



Summary:

1. **Coping skills** are things we can do to deal with stress or other difficult situations and emotions.
2. We can take an **emotion-focused** approach by responding, expressing or sitting with our emotions. A **problem-focused** approach targets the situation or trigger that is causing the emotion. A **thought-focused** approach aims to change the way we are thinking about the problem and challenge negative thoughts that are causing distress.
3. There are lots of things we can do to **soothe our emotions** or **boost our mood** such as breathing and grounding techniques, exercising, hobbies that we enjoy, hanging out with friends and family, journaling, or talking to someone about how we feel.
4. Sometimes we need to “**sit with**” emotions to build self-awareness and process what is going on.
5. **Unhelpful thinking styles** include: All or nothing thinking, having a mental filter, catastrophising, jumping to conclusions, overusing should/must, and over personalising. Being aware of these and challenging them can change the way we think about a situation, reduce stress and improve mood.
6. **Intrusive thoughts** are thoughts that we can't control. They pop into our head and cause distress. We can acknowledge that they are just thoughts and not facts and we do not need to act on them.

Extra Notes



Visit the My Wellbeing
page here!

4. Our Relationships

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the difference between constructive and destructive conflict and their impact on relationships.
2. Name the five approaches to conflict.
3. List some things that are important to consider when resolving conflict.
4. Describe what makes a good listener.
5. Describe the difference between Passive, Assertive and Aggressive communication styles.



Relationships and Conflict

Relationships are all the **connections** we make with the people around us. There are lots of different types of relationships and some will be stronger than others. Relationships change overtime and we might strengthen positive relationships and move away from more negative ones. It is completely **normal** to experience conflict in all relationships. Conflict can be anything from a **big argument** to a simple **difference in opinion**.

Conflict can be good or bad depending on how we approach the problem. When conflict is **DESTRUCTIVE** it can **escalate quickly**, and have a **negative effect** on our relationships, physical health, and mental wellbeing, especially if it is happening regularly. However, **CONSTRUCTIVE** conflict is **essential**. We need it to solve problems, share ideas, create new things and challenge injustice. Resolving conflict constructively can help strengthen our relationships.

Causes of Conflict

There are lots of things that cause conflict. Here are some common ones:



Difference in values, attitudes or beliefs



Misunderstandings (incorrect or lack of information)



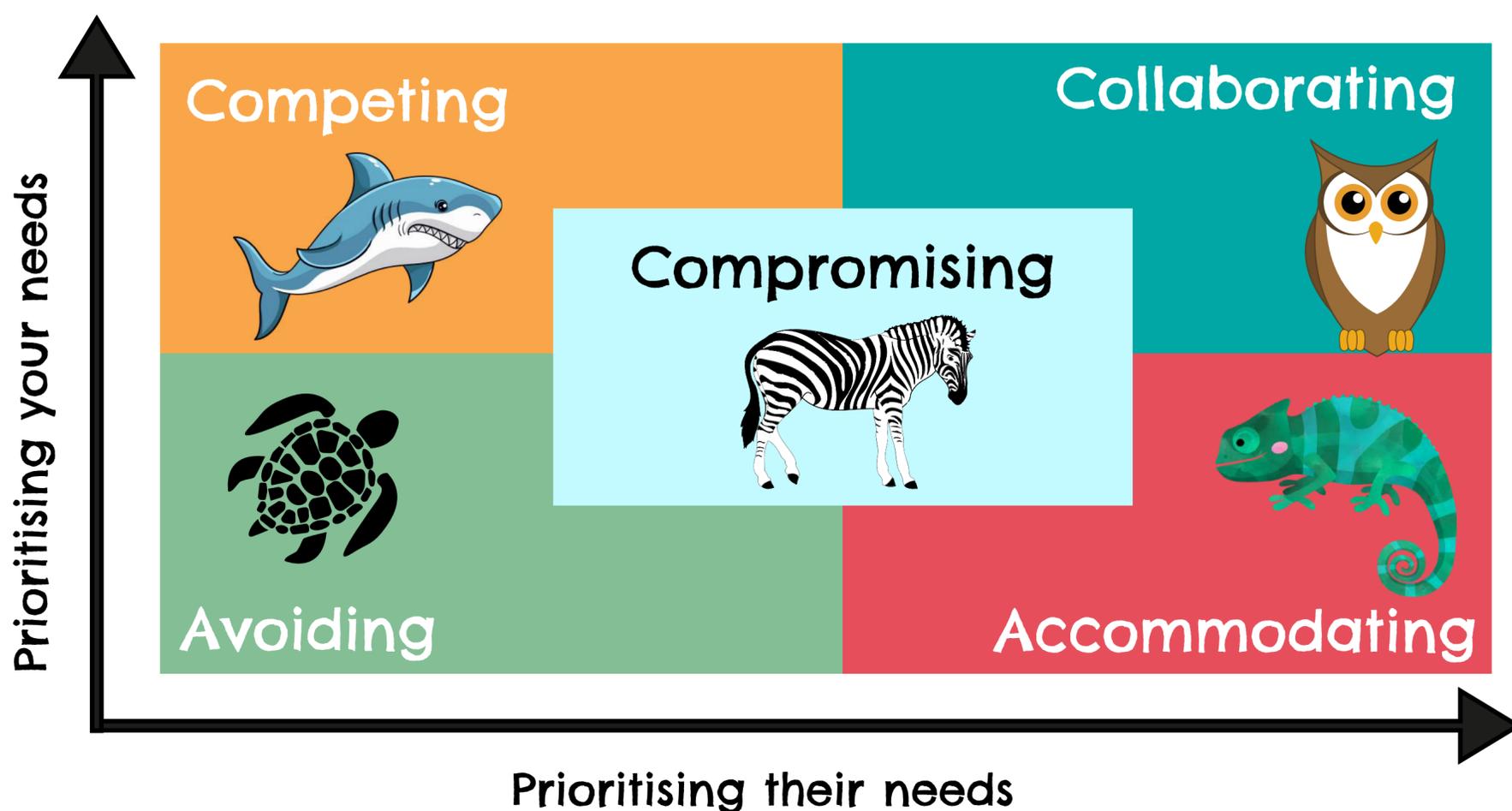
Unmet needs (conflict of interests)

What causes conflict in your relationships?

Conflict Management Styles

According to the **Thomas Kilmann Conflict Management Style Model**, there are 5 different ways we can approach conflict (see graph). We might be more prone to taking one approach over another, but all of the approaches have **benefits** in different situations. Ideally, we want to be able to **move between** approaches to get the best outcomes in different situations.

Sometimes we might respond to conflict quickly and instinctively, but often when the relationship is important to us we want to **stop and think** about our needs, their needs, and the best approach to take. To do this we need to keep our **monkey brain** engaged, understand our emotions, and be in the right emotional state.



Avoiding	Like a turtle, you hide from conflict.
Accommodating	Like a chameleon, you fit with the other persons needs.
Competing	Like a shark, you fight for what you want.
Compromising	Like a Zebra's stripes, you go 50/50 with the other person.
Collaborating	Like a wise owl, you work together to come up with a new idea.

Exercise 4.1

Instructions: Match a pro and con to each conflict approach

Pros

- 1. Helps you learn, come up with new ideas, and improve relationships.
- 2. Protects you or gives you more time to think.
- 3. Ensures your need gets met over someone else's.
- 4. Ensures both your needs are at least partly met.
- 5. Shows empathy and can improve relationships by helping someone else.

- Avoid
- Accommodate
- Compete
- Compromise
- Collaborate

Cons

- 1. Risks damaging the relationship.
- 2. Neither persons needs are met FULLY.
- 3. Your needs are not met.
- 4. Risks the issue not being resolved
- 5. Not always possible if there are a set number of options and can take time.

Activity 4a

Instructions: Think of a time when each approach would work well and a time when it might NOT work so well.

	AVOID	ACCOMMODATE	COMPETE	COMPROMISE	COLLABORATE
GOOD	When a stranger starts a fight with you				
NOT SO GOOD	When something is really bothering you				

Resolving Conflict

So we know that being in the right emotional state and using empathy, reflection and problem solving is important for resolving conflict. We might use some of the coping strategies we learnt to help soothe our emotions before we start a difficult conversation. Here are some other top tips for resolving conflict:



Communication: Listening

Listening is one of the most important communication skills. We all want to feel listened to. Listening is not just about being quiet, it's about giving the other person your **full attention** and actively **seeking to understand** their feelings and point of view. Listening can help:



Being an **ACTIVE LISTENER** involves taking a positive and open-minded approach, showing genuine interest and curiosity, using open body language, and listening with the intention of understanding rather than simply responding. We can also use summarising statements to clarify that we have understood correctly.

Activity 4b

Instructions: What makes a good listener? Hint: Think about where the listening takes place and the listener's body language and actions.

Communication: Where, When and How

Being in conflict can feel **uncomfortable** and sometimes it can be hard to start a difficult conversation. To resolve conflict, we want to make the conversation as comfortable and productive as possible. To do that we might ask ourselves **When, Where** and **How** we are going to have the conversation.

WHEN?

Are you both in the right emotional state?

Do you need to address the situation urgently or spend time thinking about it first?

What is the best time of day to talk?

WHERE?

Are you in a space you both feel comfortable?

Do you need to be somewhere private and quiet to talk?

Is the space neutral?

HOW?

Who is going to speak first?

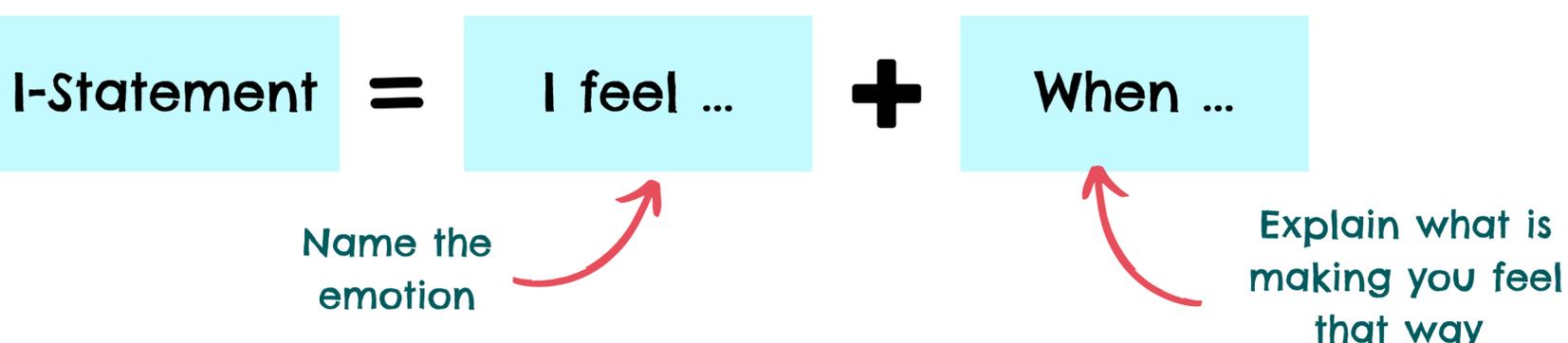
What is the main aim of the conversation?

What conflict management style will work best?

Communication: Expressing Needs

As well as listening to understand other's needs and emotions, it is also important that we can **express our own needs and emotions** clearly. Before attempting to resolve a conflict, take time to think about what you need and what you are feeling. Try using the Feelings Wheel or the Emotion Iceberg to explore your feelings. Then think about what your needs are, are you willing to compromise?

Often when we are in conflict situations we use **blaming statements** such as **"you always"** or **"you never"**. These statements don't leave space to explain how we are feeling and can often cause the other person to become **defensive**. If we use **"I"** and **"we"** instead, we can clearly express our needs and encourage others to do the same. These are called **"I-Statements"** and are made up of 2 parts:



Practice I-Statements in Exercise 4.1 and Activity 4c.

Exercise 4.2

Instructions: Match the YOU-Statements to the I-Statements

YOU never listen to me! I might as well talk to the wall.

I FEEL overwhelmed WHEN the house is cluttered and i can't find what I need.

YOU'RE always late.

I FEEL frustrated WHEN we can't communicate.

YOU'RE always telling me what to do. YOU don't own me!

I FEEL undervalued and powerless WHEN my voice isn't heard.

YOU always leave your stuff everywhere YOU'RE so messy.

I FEEL stressed WHEN there is lots to be done. I am struggling and could use some help.

YOU always ignore me, YOU'RE so rude.

I FEEL unimportant WHEN we don't meet on time.

YOU'RE so lazy, YOU never help!

I FEEL hurt and underestimated WHEN I am not trusted to make my own decisions.

Activity 4c

Instructions: Now try writing your own I-Statements:

YOU-Statement	I-Statement
You never call or text. You don't care about me!	I feelwhen
You're always in my space! Back off!	I feelwhen
You're always shouting for no reason! It's not fair!	I feelwhen

Communication Styles

There are three main communication styles: **Passive**, **Assertive** and **Aggressive**. While passive communication often results in our needs being **overlooked**, aggressive communication can **damage relationships**. Assertive communication is a way of ensuring our needs are met whilst also being **respectful** and **understanding** of the other person. Communication is not just what we say, it is how we say it, our **tone of voice**, our **body language** and our **behaviour**.

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
Body Language	Looking down/away, shrinking posture.	Relaxed posture, eye-contact, respecting personal space.	Tense body, clenched fists, not respecting personal space.
Verbal	Overly apologetic, soft tentative voice.	I-Statements, clear level voice, expressing needs.	YOU-Statements Loud hostile voice, use of insults, swearing, criticism.
Approach	"I am not important."	"We are both important."	"You are not important."
Behaviour	Avoiding, agreeing with everything.	Listening and reflecting, showing empathy, not compromising your needs.	Attempts to dominate or humiliate, interrupting.

Be aware of **PASSIVE-AGGRESSIVE** communication. This is when the person seems passive but is **indirectly aggressive** by using manipulation. They might express their anger through **sarcasm**, **backhanded compliments**, **making comments under their breath**, **sulking**, or giving the **silent treatment**. They may pretend to agree or cooperate but will not openly verbalise their feelings/views. This makes it difficult to resolve conflict and often **damages the relationship** in the process.

Activity 4d

Instructions: Rewrite these responses in an assertive communication style.

SCENARIO	Someone keeps interrupting while you are explaining something.
Passive	Sorry, you go first.
Assertive	
SCENARIO	The waiter at a restaurant brings you the wrong order.
Aggressive	You got it wrong you idiot!! Change it now!
Assertive	

Summary:

1. Conflict can be constructive or destructive depending on how we approach it. Interpersonal conflict can be any kind of disagreement or tension between 2 or more people. It is often caused by a difference in values, a misunderstanding, or a need not being met.
2. The five approaches to conflict management are: Avoiding, Accommodating, Competing, Compromising, and Collaborating. They are all useful in different situations. The trick is to adjust our approach to get the best outcome.
3. Sometimes resolving conflict involves having difficult conversations. To make it easier we can consider where, when and how we start the conversation. It can be helpful to take turns speaking, use respectful language and calm voices, keep an open mind, and focus on finding a solution.
4. Listening is an important communication and conflict resolution skill. A good listener shows genuine interest and attention, uses open and encouraging body language, aims to understand the other person's feelings and views, and clarifies their understanding.
5. There are different communication styles. Passive communication involves a quiet voice, shrinking body language and over agreeing or apologising. Aggressive communication uses tense or threatening body language, a loud voice, and hostile or blaming language. Assertive communication is being respectful of the other person while ensuring your needs are met and often involves I-statements.

Extra Notes



Visit the Our
Relationships page here

Exercise Answers

Exercise 1.1

1. Lizard - Flight response.
2. Monkey - reflection & problem solving.
3. Monkey - empathy.
4. Lizard - Fight response.
5. Lizard - Fight response.
6. Monkey - planning.
7. Lizard - Flight response.
8. Lizard - Flight/Freeze response.
9. Monkey - reflection.
10. Lizard - physical response.
11. Monkey - planning.
12. Monkey - reflection & problem solving.

Exercise 1.2

1. Alert and Engaged: Dopamine, Adrenaline, GABA Glutamate.
2. Freeze and Shutdown: Cortisol.
3. Anxious and Afraid: Adrenaline, GABA Glutamate, Cortisol.
4. Rest and Digest: Serotonin, Oxytocin, Endorphins.
5. Fight and Flight: Adrenaline, Cortisol.

Exercise 2.1

1. Anger
2. Disgust
3. Fear
4. Surprise
5. Happiness
6. Sadness
7. Contempt

To learn more visit the Paul Ekman Group website.

Exercise 4.1

Avoid: Pro 2, Con 4
 Accommodate: Pro 5, Con 3
 Compete: Pro 3, Con 1
 Compromise: 4, Con 2
 Collaborate: 1, Con 5

Exercise 4.2

1. You never listen - I feel undervalued and powerless...
2. You're always late - I feel unimportant...
3. You're always telling me what to do - I feel hurt and underestimated...
4. You always leave your stuff everywhere - I feel overwhelmed...
5. You always ignore me! - I feel frustrated...
6. You're so lazy - I feel stressed...

Activity Example Answers

NOTE: All activities are open to interpretation. The below answers may be used as a guide but there are no correct answers as activities are based on personal experiences. Not all activities have example answers.

Activity 1a

Lizard Pros: keep us safe, emotionally honest, reacts quickly.

Lizard Cons: Doesn't consider full picture or others emotions.

Monkey Pros: Considers all options and other's feelings.

Monkey Cons: Takes longer, we can sometimes hide our emotions.

Activity 1b: No Answers

Activity 2a: No Answers

Activity 2b: See page 16

Activity 2c

1. I need reassurance.
2. Show self-compassion.
3. Curiosity.
4. I need to address an injustice.
5. Self-soothe or seek help.
6. Fear.

Activity 2d Example Answers

Escalation feelings: temperature and heart rate rising, sweaty palms.

Escalation behaviours: tapping, fidgeting, standing up, clenching fists and jaw.

Crisis feelings: fast heart, anger, hotness.

Crisis behaviour: crying, shouting, running away, swearing.

De-escalation feelings: heart rate and temperature falling, muscles relaxing.

De-escalation behaviour: calming down, slow movement, lowering voice

Depression feelings: tiredness, sense of guilt, slow heart rate and breathing

Depression behaviours: shrinking body posture, withdrawal, thinking more clearly.

Activity 2e Example Answers

Emotions that might underlie anger include: rejection, disappointment, betrayal, disrespect, guilt, jealousy, embarrassment, sadness, shame, hurt, frustration, impatience, bitterness, isolation, loneliness, tiredness etc.

Activity 3a: No Answers

Activity 3b: No Answers

Activity 3c

Undeniable = "They walked past. I did not HEAR them say hello".

Evidence = I saw them and recognised them. I did not hear them say hello.

Fact = Some one I know walked past me and I didn't hear them say hello.

Deniable = They hate me.

Argue instead = They don't hate me they just didn't see me.

Opinion: I HAD THE THOUGHT THAT: They must hate me.

BUT IT COULD BE THAT: They didn't see me.

Action: I will message them and ask if they want to hang out.

Activity 4a

Avoid: good when in physical danger, not so good when a decision needs to be made.

Accommodate: Good when their needs are greater, not so good when your needs are greater.

Compete: Good when your need is greatest, not so good when it could damage a relationship.

Compromise: good when you have equal needs, not so good when it doesn't meet either need fully.

Collaborate: Good when there are many possible solutions, not so good in a right or wrong situation.

Activity 4b Example Answers

Trust, genuine interest, open body language, encouragement, nodding, no judgement, kindness, eye contact, asking questions, not interrupting, not getting distracted etc.

Activity 4c Example Answers

- I feel isolated and hurt when we don't communicate.
- I feel overwhelmed and stressed when I don't have time to myself.
- I feel confused and upset when an argument escalates before we have time to talk.

Activity 4d Example Answers

- Please allow me to finish my answer, then I am interested to hear what you think.
- I understand that it is busy tonight and you may not have heard my order. When you have time please could you change this for *correct order*.

Cyrenians SCCR - Emotions and
the Brain Workbook



Tell us what you
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to get help scan here

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